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FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7920
INFO RUEHB/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7743
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 9003

UNCLAS AIT TAIPEI 000081

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DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD - NIDA EMMONS
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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: TAIWAN'S FOREIGN RELATIONS, UN REFERENDUM

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage January 16 on the soaring of Taiwan's stock index and currency markets Tuesday in the wake of the KMT's victory in last Saturday's legislative elections; on KMT presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou, who unveiled his cross-Strait policy agenda Tuesday; on the March presidential poll; and on Taiwan's difficult foreign relations. The mass-circulation "Apple Daily" front-paged a banner headline that said "Ma Ying-jeou's New Three Noes Policy: No Unification, No Independence, and No Use of Force." The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times," on the other hand, ran a banner headline on page four that read "Frank Hsieh: Will Inactively Exercise Presidential Power if Elected."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" discussed China's relentless diplomatic battles against Taiwan. The article urged both the ruling and opposition parties jointly to safeguard Taiwan's status as an independent sovereign entity. A "China Times" editorial, however, criticized President Chen Shui-bian's manipulation of Taiwan's foreign relations in a short-term trading style, which has unfortunately enlarged Taiwan's distance from international organizations. A separate "Liberty Times" analysis discussed Taiwan's UN referendum in the wake of the Blue camp's victory in last Saturday's elections. The article said the challenge for the KMT presented by the referenda to join or re-join the UN is not over yet. End summary.

¶3. Taiwan's Foreign Relations

A) "Both Ruling and Opposition Parties Must Have a Cross-Party Consensus Regarding the Safeguarding of Taiwan's Sovereignty"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 700,000] editorialized (1/16):

"... The fact that China remains relentless in terms of its diplomatic battles against Taiwan [even] in the wake of the KMT's victory in the legislative elections is akin to conveying a clear message, namely, even if the KMT becomes the sole majority in the legislative body, and even if Ma Ying-jeou wins the presidency, China will continue its predetermined strategy to lure away all of Taiwan's diplomatic allies. ...

"Both the ruling and opposition parties, which have just concluded their campaigning [for the legislative elections], will have to take these diplomatic challenges seriously. It is Taiwan's mainstream public opinion to maintain the island's status as an independent sovereign entity. As Taiwan's ruling party, the DPP must not ignore the importance of its foreign policies just because it has recently been defeated in the elections. Particularly, it must not misinterpret the reasons for its defeat and back down from the diplomatic frontline. The KMT, on the other hand, has obtained a three-fourths majority influence in the new legislature, and it surely is obliged to make efforts to safeguard Taiwan's sovereignty

in the near future. Even just for the sake of safeguarding the Republic of China, the KMT must vigorously resist China's [continuous] attempts to press Taiwan. ..."

B) "Shouldn't [the Taiwan Government] Review the Short-term Trading Operations of Its Foreign Policy?"

The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (1/16):

"... Using trade and economics as bargaining chips can only secure relations with small countries, but the sympathy and support of big countries constitute another important pillar for Taiwan's survival.

Yet Taiwan was more badly harmed in this respect. In order to secure [the DPP's] victory in the elections, Chen Shui-bian turned the Taiwan people's simple wish of being accepted by the international community into a tool for his own political gain. He unscrupulously manipulated the [political agenda of] unification and independence and referenda, totally disregarding their [possible] costs to Taipei-Washington [relations]. As a result, the United States no longer trusts the Taiwan government; it even made moves to restrain Taiwan's diplomatic efforts. The international community, at the same time, has also seen through Chen's tricks and poured cold water on Taiwan. Taiwan's national interests were thus harmed for no particular reason, and the island's distance from the UN and the WHO is getting even wider. ..."

14. UN Referendum

"The Referenda to Join or Re-join the UN -- the Unbearable Heaviness for the Blue Camp"

Washington correspondent Nadia Tsao noted in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 700,000] (1/16):

"Even though the U.S. government declined to say it clearly, most U.S. scholars who have been monitoring cross-Straits situation for a long time pointed out that in the wake of the KMT's landslide victory in [last Saturday's] legislative elections, the pressure caused by [the DPP-proposed] UN referendum has greatly eased both for Washington and Beijing. This is because the DPP will hardly be able to retain its authority to dictate policies, even if the referendum passes [in March]. But for the KMT, which has just scored a victory, the tests presented by the referenda to join or re-join the UN are not over yet! ..."

"Taiwan's bid to join the UN is an ongoing, high-consensus foreign policy for the island. Should the KMT decide to mobilize Taiwan voters not to pick up their ballots for the two referenda, one of the possible scenarios will be that the DPP-proposed UN referendum is passed while [the KMT-proposed] referendum [for Taiwan] to rejoin the UN fails to pass. [Should this happen,] not only will it manifest the fact that the KMT lacks sincerity toward the referendum system, but also that the KMT will have to implement the DPP's policy if it wins the presidential elections. On the other hand, if both referenda fail to pass, is [the Taiwan government] going to shelve its UN bid that has been pushed by the government since the Lee Teng-hui Administration? Will the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' UN membership task force based in New York have to be dissolved?

"Even though the chances are slim for Taiwan to become a UN member in the short term, [the government's] diplomatic efforts over the past decades have made the UN member states realize Taiwan's position as an independent sovereign entity; certain connections and talented foreign service personnel have also been cultivated. Malawi's recent decision to switch diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing also proved that China is taking full advantage of the UN stage to lure away Taiwan's diplomatic allies. What kind of a message will be sent to the international community and Taiwan's foreign service officers then if the two referenda on Taiwan's bid to join or re-join the UN, respectively, both fail to pass? ..."

YOUNG